

A review on

Early Muslim Historians

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MUSLIM HISTORIANS

The literature on Muslim writing on history is extensively varied and abundant. It is in the form of original manuscripts, possibly thousands of them, scores of treatises on individual historians, many secondary works in the form of articles, and other larger works, some very bulky in size and contents.

To form an idea of such richness, nothing better than starting with some useful references. As with much else, or nearly everything else, works in German dominate, above all Wustenfeld's *Geschichtsschreiber der Araber und ihre Werke*,¹ and Carl Brockelmann's *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur*,² both crucial to any avid seeker of knowledge of Muslim historiography. Also necessary to look into, and much more recent, but still in German, is Sezgin's *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*.³ There are some works by the French, but not as rich as in geography, a subject they master. In English, there is Rosenthal's⁴ *A History of Muslim Historiography*, and Dunlop's section on the subject in his *Arab Civilization to AD 1500*.⁵ Humphrey's summary in the Dictionary of the Middle Ages covers well the bit of information on the Ottomans and Ibn Khaldun.⁶ There are also scores of articles and entries on the subject left and right. The best source, in English, however, and by very far, remains Sarton's *Introduction to the History of Science*, that is the appropriate sections in each volume. Sarton literally enlightens on each and every Muslim historian, East and West, and gives the bibliography related to each. He passes little judgement as far as the ideology of the scholar is concerned, and, above all, keeps away from the frequent Orientalist-Western practice of seeing good and excellence in every Islamic dissention, or source of dissention, and its author, and expanding it non-end in their writing, thus turning the mediocre and obscure into excellent, and obscuring the excellent.

History is the teacher of life" reminds us De Somogyi.⁷ Everything that exists, he holds, can only be correctly understood by its past. Therefore, history is no abstract study but provides the key to the right appreciation of everything that is actual, that is part and parcel of our own present. Consequently the precise and true recording of past events and conditions is of great significance for the conscious formation of the future. That is only historical interest is one of 'the oldest mental activities of mankind, which can be found even in the remotest periods of religious, national, or any other type of human society'.⁸ For Al-Jahiz, history is a 'Royal science'. Ibn Khaldun was to make it so centuries later, setting patterns for others to follow.

Amongst the earliest, or possibly the earliest historian of Islam, is Wahb Ibn Munabbih (d.728) a Yememnite author. He reports on legends, and reflects on the people of the book, as well as on oral traditions.⁹ He is also well acquainted with Biblical texts. His book *al-Mubtada* (The beginning) is lost, but fragments can be found with Ibn Qutayba and al-Tabari. Although Wahb cannot be considered as a reliable historian,¹⁰ he still exerted a big influence on his followers. On the whole, early Muslim historical writing was primarily concerned with the biography of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) (*Sirat Rasul Allah*) and the first wars of Islam (*Al-maghaz*) both of which started under the Umayyads. Muhammad Ibn Ishaq (d.768) relates the first biographie Sira known of the Prophet (PBUH), much of which was incorporated by Ibn Hisham (d.833) in whose work can also be found much on the creation of the world, Biblical prophets, and the advent of Islam. He corrects hadiths, and also rids his accounts of legends and poetry that are not on the reliable side. The actions and deeds of the Prophet (PBUH) are scrupulously noted, and his battles described in great detail.¹¹ Ibn Hisham's *Sirat Muhammad rasul Allah* is considered by Dunlop one of the best existing authorities on the life of the Prophet (PBUH).¹² The Arabic text of Ibn Hisham, in three volumes, was published at Cottingen by Wustenfeld, whilst a German translation was made by Weil, and an English translation by

A. Guillaume. Al-Waqidi (d.823) the author of *Maghazi* (battles of the Prophet), is even more rigorous and methodical than Wahb. He indicates his sources clearly, and describes facts as accurately as possible, eliminating legends.¹³ Other than *Kitab al-maghazi*, al-Waqidi produced many other works, twenty eight books listed by *The Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadim amongst which are *Futuh al-Sham*, *Futuh al-Iraq*, etc.

With Ibn Sa'd (d.845), a pupil and secretary of Ibn al-Waqidi, begins the genre of biographies of *Tabaqats* (classes). His treatise *Kitab al-tabaqat al-Kabir* (the great book of classes), first deals with the biographies of the Prophet (PBUH), and his companions and later dignitaries of Islam till 845. Ibn Sa'ad elaborates on the qualities of the prophet, and the main traits of his mission. Taking into account the works of his predecessors, Ibn Sa'ad gives a larger focus to the embassies sent to the Prophet or sent by him. It is the first major example of religious biography, universal in scope, trying to include all the religiously relevant persons of Islamic history, comprising 4,250 entries, 600 of them women.¹⁴ Ibn Saad's work can be found in a Sachau edition and in others.¹⁵

A third type, between *Sira* and *Maghazi* literature, is noted by De Somogyi¹⁶ that is the historical monograph which deals with general historical events, but confined to a certain event or period. The founder of this type Abu Mihnaf (fl.7th century) to whom many works are ascribed.

Influenced very much by Ibn Saad and al-Waqidi is Al-Baladhuri (d.892). He covers Islamic history from its origins until the Abbasids. His works includes *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan* and *Kitab ansab al-ashraf*, the first of these making his reputation,¹⁷ and is considered indispensable reading in the matter of the Muslim *Futuhats*. It goes on from Arabia to Syria, and Mesopotamia and progresses both in a geographical and chronological order. The author takes his information from people, scholars and officials, relying on a vast correspondence, searching for accurate information. All details matter to him: culture, economy, politics, social acts, but chooses very strictly, and observes a critical approach, seeking to remain objective as much as possible.¹⁸ Al-Baladhuri also gives a very interesting account on the Muslim presence in southern Italy, a twenty or thirty year history, about which nothing else would be known if it was not for al-Baladhuri.¹⁹ According to al-Mas'udi, 'we know no better book on the conquests of the lands, than al-Baladhuri's'.²⁰ As for *Kitab Ansab al-Ashraf* (book of the Genealogies of the Nobles) is a work of at least twelve volumes, details of which are given by Brockelman.²¹ Various parts of the work were translated and edited in multiple languages, such as in Italian by Olga Pinto and Levi della Vida.

Although al-Mas'udi and his *Muruj al-Dahab* ranks high in the field, it is Al-Tabari, who, by far, remains the greatest of all amongst Muslim pre-Ibn Khaldun historians. Al-Tabari (d.923) was born at Amul, north of the Elburz range in the coastal lowlands of the Caspian sea then called Tabaristan, and died in Baghdad. He is the author of a monumental work in many volumes *Tarikh al-Rusul wa'l Muluk*, (History of the Apostles and the Kings), to which the Europeans refer as *The Annals*.²² In this work, Al-Tabbari looks at Antiquity and the Islamic period up to 915. Known as a commentator of the Kuran, he applies a critical methodology of hadith. He undertakes a series of travels through Iraq, Syria and Egypt, taking witnesses from his contemporaries. As an objective historian, he hardly expresses any judgement, and keeps a global vision of history.²³ His book is a major source of information for scholars, which according to Ibn Khalliqan is the soundest and most reliable of its kind.²⁴ For the history of Islam the *Annals* is no doubt the best single narrative work,²⁵ for its scope (fifteen volumes in the Leiden edition of De Goeje).²⁶ On the whole, according to Dunlop, with the exception of Ibn al-Athir, whose great history *Al-kamil*, has not been translated in its entirety (by the time Dunlop was writing, in the early 1970s) into any western language,²⁷ the *Annals* of al-Tabari is the best work in Arabic for information about the historical development of Islam and the Caliphate, the most characteristic institution to which the new religion gave rise, and which marks the zenith in world

history of the Arab race.²⁸ For Rosenthal, Al-Tabari brought to his work the scrupulousness and indefatigable long-windedness of the theologian, the accuracy and love of order of the scholarly jurist, and the insight into political affairs of the practicing lawyer-politician.²⁹ It was, thus, only natural that his work never ceased to exercise a considerable influence upon future historians, serving as a model of how history ought to be written.³⁰

Muslim Spain

Muslim Spain produced an excellent crop of historians. Abu bakr Al-Razi (no relation to the physicist and chemist) flourished in Spain in the year 936-7. He is the earliest whose work has been transmitted to us, and is called by the Spaniards *El cronista por excellencia* (the Chronicler per excellence).³¹ His Arabic text is lost, but there exist a Castilian version, itself derived from a Portuguese translation.³² Ibn al-Qutiyya (d.977), son of the Gothic woman, a member of the former ruling dynasty in Visigothic Spain is the author of *Tarikh Iftitah al-Andalus*. Al-Andalusi (d.1034), a judge at Toledo, was the author of *Tabaqat al-Umam*. In it he gives a wide spectrum on civilization up to his time.³³ He studies the people and nations that cultivate science and ranks amongst them the Arabs, Hindus, Iranians, Greeks, and Jews, showing their contribution to scientific progress. He was subsequently heavily relied upon by Al-Qifti, Ibn abi Usaybi'a and others. Ibn Hayyan (d.1076) composed *Kitab al-Muqtabis fi tarikh al-Andalus*³⁴ and *Kitab al-matin (the Solid Book)*, describing the main events around him. He sought to remain objective in his writing throughout despite the upheavals affecting Muslim Spain, then, not disregarding even those events that pained him. Ibn Hayyan's *Kitab al-matin*, which according to Ibn Sa'id contained nearly sixty volumes,³⁵ was believed at one time to be held at the Zaytuna in Tunisia.³⁶ Whether still there remains to be clarified. Al-Humaydi (d.1095), who came from the city of Majorqa, was a student of Ibn hazm. He emigrated to the Orient because of troubles in Spain (the beginning of the Spanish Christian reconquest), and established himself in Baghdad. His work *Jawdat al-Muqtabis*,³⁷ is about the history of Spanish scholars. It includes many volumes, and gives in alphabetical order the biographies of the main traditionalists, jurists, political figures, army generals etc.. nearly a thousand entries. Al-Humaydi was to become a major source of reference for Al-Maqqari and Ibn Khalikan. Other than these Spanish historians, more followed, with the main ones published in the series founded by Francisco Codera, *Bibliotheca Arabico-Hispana*, from 1882 onwards.³⁸

The Crusades

The history of the crusades, two centuries of warfare (1098-1291), although generally set aside by western writers when dealing with Muslim historians, is well documented by a large number of historians. Ibn al-Athir (d.1233) from al-Jazira, Baghdad, is one such historians. He belongs to a family of learned brothers, and is the author of *Kitab al-kamil fi'l tarikh* (the perfect in history). This work has been edited by the Danish orientalist C.J. Tornberg,³⁹ and is, according to Dunlop, with the *Annals* of al-Tabari, one of the most highly valued sources of Islamic history, highly reliable and readable. It has been much studied by scholars of the West, Brocklemann making the relationship of the *Kamil* and the *Annals* the subject of his doctoral thesis,⁴⁰ whilst Sir William Muir uses him as his chief guide after al-Tabari.⁴¹ In the book, amongst others, is described the capture of Antioch by the crusaders in 1098, a crusade the author sees as part of a three pronged attack by the Christian world against Islam: in Spain, in Sicily, and now in the Holy land.⁴² Qadi al-fadil al-Baysani (d.1200), some time prior to Ibn al-Athir, was concerned with more events of the Crusades, notably Salah-Eddin's naval expeditions to Aylah and other military operations.⁴³ Another historian of great repute was Usama Ibn Munqidh (fl. 1138-1188); born in the castle of Shayzar in the Valley of the Orontes, fifteen miles north of Hama, but who spent his life mostly in Damascus. Usama lived in the times of Salah Eddin al-Ayyubi, witnessing the first decades of Crusader onslaught and settlement in the Muslim lands, and was himself involved in fighting them. At an old age he composed *Kitab al-Itibar* (learning by example), a book which contains

many anecdotes on the customs of the Franks, their inhumanity at peace and at war, and deriding their inferior medical practice. Editions and translations of Usama's work have been done by Derenbourg⁴⁴ in French, Shuman⁴⁵ in German, Porter⁴⁶ in English. And from an Escorial (Spain) manuscript,⁴⁷ Philip Hitti⁴⁸ delivered by far the best work of the lot in English. Ibn al-Furat, unlike Usama, gave accounts of the later stages of Frankish presence, of the time they were being finally driven out by Baybars (about a century after Salah Eddin). Ibn al-Furat was born in Cairo and lived between the years 1334-1405. He wrote his book, *Tarikh al-Duwal wal Muluk* thus some time after the event itself, yet it is a work of great wonder in every sense. This treatise survives, incomplete, in the National Library of Vienna, whilst a section from it, unknown, has long been preserved in the Vatican Library until discovered by the French historian: Le Strange. It was he who described this part in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society.⁴⁹ Parts of Ibn al-Furat's work has been selected and translated by U and M.C. Lyons.⁵⁰ They gave those extracts in two volumes, the first of which being the Arabic text, the second its translation. From those extracts can be gleaned some very interesting events of the later stages of the Crusades' presence in Muslim land such as the recovery of Jerusalem, Tiberias, Ascalon and other places from the crusaders. Most of all, Ibn al-Furat describes the rise of and campaigns of Baybars and his crushing of Mongols, Crusaders, and Armenians.

Lives and Deeds Of Scholars

So many Muslim historians wrote on the lives and deeds of eminent personalities of Islam. Ibn Asakir⁵¹ (d.1176) distinguished himself with his great History of Damascus: *Tarikh Dimashq*. He Lived in Damascus, and taught tradition at the Ummayyad Mosque, then in a college. Throughout, he maintained good relations with Ayyubid sultans. The first two volumes of his treatise are devoted to Damascus and its monuments, and the two others, by alphabetical order, give the entries on main figures of city: princes, governors, judges, poets, and so on. Ibn Khalikan,⁵² born in 1211 at Irbil, Jazirah, east of the Tigris, received his first training from his father. He spent most of his working life in Syria, though, where he exerted as Qadi and where he taught. His only work, *Kitab wafayat al-a'yan wa-anba abna al-zaman* (the death of great personages and histories of the leading people of the time), is a dictionary of the great men of Islam, containing 865 biographies. In it, he takes considerable pains to give accurate information, tracing genealogies, spelling names correctly, giving the main traits of each personality, adding anecdotes, and fixing dates of birth and death; and when unsure about a detail, he omits the entry altogether. The holograph manuscript of the *wafayat* is deposited at the British Museum, and the manuscript itself has been repeatedly edited by Wustenfeld⁵³ and De Slane,⁵⁴ on top of the excellent translation by de Slane in English.⁵⁵ Entries on Ibn Khalikan can also be gleaned in every sort of compendium or encyclopaedia. The rich value of such Islamic works is raised by De Somogyi,⁵⁶ who points out that although many biographies of European rulers or autographies from the Middle Ages exist, 'we do not know of any such comprehensive and chronologically arranged collections of biographies or such extensive and alphabetically arranged biographical dictionaries as have survived by the score in Arabic literature.' Such works constitute a rich repository of information from which precious data may be drawn by Islamic scholars and students of general history alike. And such information can be used for comparison with, or, and supplementation to the other pertinent sources of Arabic historiography.⁵⁷

Works on the lives and deeds of Muslim scholars and scientists have also been considerable in numbers and size. Those by Ibn Nadim, Yaqut al-Hamawi, and Hadji Khalifa will be the object of another work. Here, the ones to refer to are Ibn al-Qifti and Ibn Abi usaybia, both of whom focussed on the physicians of Islam. Ibn al-Qifti was born in Qift, in upper Egypt in 1172-1173. He flourished in Cairo, then Jerusalem, and finally Aleppo.⁵⁸ He was many times wazir for the Ayyubid rulers, and was extremely well learned, his library valued after his death at 60000 dinars, which was considerable at the time. Much of al-Qifti's work is lost to us. It only survives in abbreviated form, but is still being one of the most important sources on Muslim physicians, men of sciences and philosophers. Ibn

abi'Usaibia, born in Damascus in 1203-4 in a medical family, studied in Damascus, and worked in the al-Nasiri Hospital in Cairo. He compiled a collection of medical observations, now lost. His main historical work was *Kitab uyun al-anba fi tabaqat al-atiba* (sources of information on the classes of physicians), a series of bio-bibliographies of the most eminent physicians from the earliest times until his. It is and remains the main source for the history of Muslim medicine, dealing with about 400 Muslim physicians. The work is divided in fifteen chapters, evolving from the origins of medicine, and its development, to the physicians of Islam in every country. Because Muslim physicians also excelled in other sciences, the book informs on such scientific activities as well.⁵⁹ Wustenfeld derives much of his information from Ibn Abi 'Usaybia, but it is Muller's edition, in German, which is most informative including 162 additional pages, a preface, corrections, and a complete index.⁶⁰ Ibn Abi 'Usaybia became the authority dealing with Muslim scientists, Wustenfeld, of course, but above all Lucien Leclerc in his *'Histoire de la Medicine Arabe* (History of Arab medicine),⁶¹ a two volumes (over a thousand pages) unique source of reference on the subject.

Egypt

The history of Egypt, so important in many respects, is handled by Ibn Taghribidi (d.1469) who wrote *an-Nujum az-Zahira fi Muluk Misr wal-Qahira* (the Brilliant Stars in the Kings of Misr and Cairo). It gives excellent accounts of events from the time of the Muslim arrival until 1468, that is to the eve of the author's death. It is divided into seven volumes of annals; so extensive that Juynboll, Matthes, and Popper all worked on the edition of parts of the work. Also considerable in length and importance is Al-Maqrizi's (d.1442) work. A man of the law, and teacher in Cairo, he collected his material, much of which absolutely unique, to compile his major work: *Kitab al-Khitat*.⁶² In it, all that happened in Egypt throughout the centuries preceding him is extensively described: places, towns, events, daily life, culture, archaeology, economy and finance. Al-Maqrizi also compiled *Kitab al-Suluk li Ma'rifat Duwal al Muluk* (book of Entrance to the knowledge of the dynasties of the Kings), which is a history of Egypt from the time of Salah Eddin (1169) to 1440-1. It is thus a history of two dynasties, the Ayyubids and the Mamluks. The Frenchman Quatremere made a translation of a large portion of this work, and also an edition of the Arabic version up to 1354.⁶³

North Africa

In North Africa, flourished at the end of the thirteenth century Ibn al-Idhari al-Marrakushi.⁶⁴ He wrote a history of Africa and Spain, *Kitab al-bayan al-mughrib*, which includes the most detailed account of the Umayyads of Cordova. Dozy turned the work into French,⁶⁵ and a partial translation was made in Spanish by Francisco Fernandez Gonzalez.⁶⁶ Also from North Africa, but belonging to a later era, was Al-Maqqari: (d.1632). Born in Tlemcen, Western Algeria, he established himself in Cairo. He compiled a whole literary and historical encyclopaedia of Muslim Spain entitled: *Nafh al-Tib*.⁶⁷ The work is divided in two parts, one dealing with the history of Spain, and the other about the life of the historian, wazir, and contemporary of Ibn Khaldun: Ibn al-Khatib, or Lissan ad-din.

Unlike many who preferred to dwell on the romantic poetry side of Lissan ad-Din, De Gayangos went for the more stimulating and highly informative history of Muslim Spain.⁶⁸ The edition by De Gayangos is over 2000 pages long, divided into many books, evolving from the pre-Islamic Spain, to the conquest of that country, the description of life and culture of the Muslims, their cities, Cordova, most of all, the wars between Muslims and Christian, the arrival of the Berber armies (Almoravids and Almohads) to fight off the Christian onslaught, the divisions and conflicts between the Muslims, the Christian re-conquest of the country, the fall of Grenada, and in the end, the final expulsion of hundreds of thousands (or millions) of Muslims from the country. De Gayangos states in the preface, that he fixed his interest upon al-Maqqari because he was to his knowledge the one authority presenting a continuous history of the Muslim presence in Spain from the beginning and through the centuries. It also offers a

vast store of knowledge derived from other historians, which helps form a critical history of the country.⁶⁹ Al-Maqqari transmits the extracts and fragments taken from other works, in most instances giving the titles as well as the names of their authors, thus presenting the original text of ancient historians whose writings were most probably lost.⁷⁰

Ottoman Turks

The history of the Ottoman Turks is one of the richest, if not the richest of all histories, stretching from the Middle Ages to our times (twentieth century) and over the largest stretch of land ever affected by any single power. It will require a whole, voluminous encyclopaedia to give it justice. Yet, those centuries and immense vastness, so rich in events of all sorts, most of which are crucial to our understanding of world history, battles and wars in their thousands, movements of people, upheavals of gigantic proportions, and so on; all these are as if they had never existed as can be grasped from the works of those writing on Muslim historiography. These are also the very 'scholars' who manage to turn obscure figures and events into major landmarks of history. Humphreys,⁷¹ a little more than others, gave one or two glimpses of Turkish history, spelling out one or two comments and some names. He observes that the earliest historical writing in Ottoman Turkish (mid fifteenth century) seems to represent a distinct and independent tradition; that it is almost 'folkloric in its narrative patterns', relying on a colloquial style. One example of such is the chronicle of Ottoman history by Ashiq Pasha Zade (fl. 1485). With the *Tevarih-i Al-i Osman* of Kemalpasha-zade (fl. 1500), however, he adds, Ottoman historians began to adopt 'the ornate courtly style used in contemporary Persian historiography.'

From the mid sixteenth century on, Ottoman writers began to show some concern for the deeds of sultans and viziers, and also for the principles which govern the rise and fall of states. This concern, he explains, being the result of growing consciousness of decadence and decline, as seen in the writing of such imposing figures as Mustafa 'Ali (d. 1600), Katib Chelebi (d. 1657), and Na'ima (d. 1716). The latter two were particularly impressed by Ibn Khaldun in this specific area, and sought to apply them to the developments observed within the Ottoman polity. Obviously Humphrey's short entry dismisses the matter all too quickly. At this point it will be too difficult to expand on the whole variety of Ottoman historiography, but a subsequent return to the subject is most needed. Here suffices it to add one or two other very useful pointers in relation to Turkish history.

For a good description of Algeria in Turkish times, prior to the French arrival (1830), there is Ali Riza Pasha's *Mir'at al-Cezayir* (a View of Algeria).⁷² Khayreddin Barbarossa, known in Western circles as a corsair, and who fought the Spanish onslaught on Algeria, also left first accounts of his military campaigns, and overall description of the condition of the Muslims in Spain. His '*Gazavat-I Hayreddin Pasa*,' British Museum, Or.Ms.no 2798, is the main source for such events. There are also other versions of this manuscript, as in Italian by A. Gallota,⁷³ or by the Spaniard Francisco Lopez de Gomara.⁷⁴ Khayreddin was also directly involved in carrying Muslim exiles from Spain during their expulsion, to other Islamic lands. In his work he particularly resents the loss of those exiles of their children who were kept behind to be raised as Christians.⁷⁵

Ibn Khaldun

Nothing better to finish this summary than with Ibn Khaldun (d.1406), a figure, who, had he been named Smith, Jacques or Lopez, would have been declared the greatest mind that ever lived. Despite the usual

dismissive attitudes towards anything Islamic, there is still enough recognition of the genius of such a figure, from whose work sprang our modern sociology, history, political and economic theory. There are literally thousands of works that have been devoted to Ibn Khaldun, long and short, as well as conferences, classes and seminars, besides entries under his name in every encyclopaedia or dictionary, some of them quite original as that in the universal biography published in French.⁷⁶ Ibn Khaldun's major work: *The Muqquadimma*⁷⁷ (The Introduction) is a gigantic endeavour, a discourse on universal history in six chapters. Chapter one deals with geography: physical and humane. Chapter two deals with urban and rural life. Chapter three is on the state and its working. Chapter four describes cities, their prosperity and fall. Chapter five deals with economics, whilst the final chapter covers sciences, their classifications and their development. Ibn Khaldun also discusses the history of the Arabs, the Jews, the Khalifs, the passage from family to tribe, their confederation, empires, their natural limits, duration and their fall... He expands on administration, government, the law, religion, finance, taxes, war, trade, urban and rural life, arts, sciences, architecture, and music, too. In his work, Ibn Khaldun does not just describe events, but also looked at their source, and elaborated upon them. He criticises some of his predecessors, arguing that information has to be supported by facts, repeatedly, warning on the pitfalls that can induce historians into errors. He rejects partiality, always making thoroughly certain of facts; thus giving a new scientific dimension to the social sciences. In economic theory, four centuries before A. Smith, De Somogyi holds,⁷⁸ Ibn Khaldun had already concluded that labour was the source of prosperity. He had also distinguished between the direct source of income in agriculture, industry and commerce, and the indirect source of income of civil servants and private employees. In respect to universal historiography he was the first to lay the foundation of the pragmatic method and make social evolution the object of historical research.⁷⁹ Humphrey explains that Ibn Khaldun was also the first to argue that history was a true science based on philosophical principles.⁸⁰ History involves speculation and an attempt to get at the truth, 'subtle' explanation of the causes and origins of existing things, and a deep knowledge of the how and why of events. Historical knowledge, thus, is not the same as factual data about the past, but consists 'of the principles of human society' which are elicited from these data in a complex process of induction and deduction.⁸¹ Mere piling up of facts is not the object of historical study if these facts cannot be determined correctly, there is no basis for historical knowledge in the true sense. And, following a long held Muslim tradition, and along with most Muslim historians, Ibn Khaldun agreed that facts depended on the authorities who had transmitted stories about the past, and that these transmitters should be men widely recognized for their erudition and probity.

Ibn Khaldun advises that historians rely on the past for understanding the present, that they use their own experience to understand the underlying conditions of their society and the principles governing them. In studying the past, they must discover the underlying conditions of those times and decide whether and how far the apparent principles of their own age are applicable. The understanding of the past, thus, becoming the tool by which to evaluate the present. Ultimately, once they fully understand the laws of human society, they can apply them directly to any new body of historical information they confront,⁸² which exactly fits in with the opening statement made at the start of the essay by De Somogyi. With the latter it must be concluded, that if the degree of evolution of any social type is to be measured by the development of its historiography, 'a prominent place is due to Islam among the cultures of mankind.'⁸³

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- ²⁷ By the time Dunlop was making such a statement, a UNESCO project was under way to produce a complete English translation of the work.
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- ³⁰ Ibid, p.135.
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- ³⁶ C.Brockelmann: GAL, i.338.
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